APCU MEETING

San Antonio, Texas

March 23, 1990

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As I read through the agenda for this meeting and noted the breadth and depth of the speakers you will hear on the topic of the Presbyterian Church and Higher Education, and as I read through, with great interest, the wonderfully stimulating papers on the same topic which Oscar Remick sent me - papers representing speeches you have heard on this topic in years past - it occurred to me that I have little, nothing in fact, to add to that particular mountain of wisdom. I don't know anything about the topic at the philosophic level that you don't already know. I was invited to throw out the first ball at a Cubs game last year. I loved the experience. I did not confuse myself with the starting pitcher, however.

I am, first of all, very glad you are concerned about this topic. I think it is an important one for all of us. I'll sleep better tonight knowing you are losing sleep worrying about it.

I do spend a lot of my time listening to the church. So I may have an insight or two from that perspective. But first and foremost I am a consumer, a market. My wife and I are the parents of five. The first graduated from the College of Wooster in 1983. The second attended Denison. The third went to Princeton. The fourth, Franklin and Marshall. Number five is a freshman back at Wooster, where it all began. I have never bothered to calculate what the Federal Government, the institutions, the kids - by way of their own mountain of debt - and I have tied up in this enterprise. Now there is only one, and since my station in the economy no longer qualifies him nor me for loans or grants, I am paying the full fare. We have an agreement in our home. Sue pays and I simply don't ask how much. She assures me I don't want to know.

We, and they, spurned the excellent opportunity to buy the product inexpensively (that's a very relative term by the way) in favor of some of the most expensive, several of which are, and all were church schools.

So, I asked Sue if it had mattered to her. We were never aware of pushing or leaning on their choices, but no doubt we did, and I wondered whether the church thing mattered. She said it did indeed. She isn't sure exactly why, but we feel better somehow, knowing Henry Copeland has Brian for a while. Henry knows Brian's name which I think is a good thing. The President of Franklin and Marshall didn't know mine, nor any other students' as far as I could tell. It has something to do with caring I suppose, although I do not and would not claim that Presbyterians, or Christians, have a monopoly on that. It has something to do, obviously, with a commitment which grows stronger all the time to a Liberal Arts education on a moderately sized campus. But it's still more than that. It has something to do with stewardship, I suppose: a sense that part of what getting educated is about, is learning that we owe something back to the nation, the race, the world, the future; some sense that service is

part of the obligation and privilege of human life. Or, if you will, that Jesus was dead right when he said: "lose your life and find it: save it and lose it" - a truth we think is fairly central, basic and maybe the only hope we have.

So then I surveyed them. All five were home, by lovely happenstance, two weekends ago, - from parenting and doctoring and selling bonds and writing and playing basketball for Wooster, an exercise which had been cut short by the Methodists at Ohio Wesleyan. (Where else in the entire sweep of college basketball can you play against the "Battlin Bishops?") So I asked them what they thought about the church connection and, as you might have guessed, they said...

Not much, at first. None, as far as I know, ever attended a campus worship event. The times the five of them went to church in the respective towns can be counted on one hand. However, the most flagrant secular humanist of the bunch while a student, was just ordained as an Elder in her church in Texas. Anyhow, they didn't go to chapel, didn't participate in traditional religious activity. They did march for hunger, organize black and women's studies programs, hold candles for South Africa... and one of them, the captain of his football team, prayed in the huddle... The Running Rebels of the University of Nevada at Las Vegas no doubt do that, however. The Princeton grad said the chapel was his favorite spot and he used to go there and sit and was glad it was there. And they appreciated the courses in religion and they challenged the sister whose school required Philosophy or Religion by saying "there's a difference, you know, and the fact that your school doesn't know shows us something about the quality of your degree."

I'm not sure it's worth much, but that's how it is with one of your best market families.

Then I surveyed the people. A group of officers were at a breakfast meeting last Saturday morning and I circulated a questionnaire. Now these are not casual Presbyterians: these are your zealots - although "Presbyterian zealot" is a bit of an oxymoron. These are the first team - twenty-five of them in an urban congregation that attempts to be intentionally Presbyterian.

Question one: How many colleges/universities are related to the Presbyterian Church U.S.A?

One said two
Five said twenty
One said one hundred
One said one hundred-fifty
Only one out of twenty-five came within twenty of knowing. No big deal.

Question two: Name several -

Eight couldn't name one
Two named Knox, a logical choice - but wrong.
Six named Princeton
Franklin and Marshall got a vote - for me, I suppose. But so did Notre Dame.
A few of the twenty-five knew a few of the schools.
No one named Lake Forest, in a suburb of Chicago.

Question three: If you were helping a student decide, would the Presbyterian relationship matter? -

One half said no
Only four said yes.

Question four: Expectations of a church school? -

They varied, but a few common ones included:

Excellence - high demand - liberal arts - values -
Someone said decent football - reverence for life -
diversity - freedom.

My final research was done Tuesday night. I was at a dinner meeting and my partner was the retired chairman of the English Department at the University of Chicago. He is Jewish, I believe. I asked what he thought. His response was quick and strong. "I love them. Church schools do it best. You'd think we'd be suspicious of places like Hope and Calvin - not at all. Those kids know how to work."

For myself - some random reflections:

One. The relationship between church and colleges is part of the heritage, part of who we are. We are a church which started colleges wherever it went for God's glory and for the world's betterment. We are colleges started by churches. It's not good to deny one's roots - so it seems to me. The past, in this case particularly, is worth affirming, simply for integrity's sake and identity.

Two. Ours has always been a faith seeking understanding. "Truth is in order to goodness." I never felt I knew what that meant, but it has something to do with the goodness of truth and the goodness of God and therefore the holiness of truth and the truth of the holy. God is glorified when truth is pursued anywhere - but I am personally grateful that it gets said publicly and institutionally... by colleges whose catalogs read, "related to... or formerly related or founded by, or in the tradition of "the Presbyterian Church"...

My commitment to the Liberal Arts is strong, but I feel better about even the Liberal Arts when the context intentionally affirms the transcendent and therefore provides perspective which serves all of us - even those who choose not to believe it - best.

Three. Simply by existing as church related institutions of higher education, you keep alive an aspect of this culture - this civilization which is in danger, not so much from its intellectual foes as from the great trivialization of religion - namely the ability, as Nathan Pusey I believe once put it to say "God" without embarrassment or hesitation.

Four. We need to be able to express that part of the Christian tradition about which we have developed some expertise - namely the celebration of the free pursuit of truth, the dignity of the individual, the diversity of the world, the hopefulness of the human enterprise... If it isn't done by throwing a few dollars into your tills, I devoutly hope you will help us identify how better to do it -

New minority schools?
Scholarships?
Endowed chairs of theology and culture?

Finally, Oscar said something about our reflecting generally on the church's future. Once again there are people whose vision is far sharper and more global than mine. We are, of course, restructuring and in transition, which is a little like saying we are still alive. But, in fact, it appears that it will be a while before we can stop transisting and restructuring and engaging in reunion and get back to our part of the educational covenant. So, it occurs to me - and this is only mine - that you might want to give us a while, say twenty-five years, before you do something precipitous. As my wife tells me when I try to lose weight overnight, it took twenty years going on.

The people I know best care about higher education.

It is my distinct impression that while they might not how know many and who you are, they clearly value the connection. It is important to them that their church relate to institutions of higher education.

The General Assemblies may not have money to give, but many of those individual Presbyterians do - and who you are will make a difference - when they decide to which institutions of higher education they give it.

Thank you for inviting me to be here. I'm glad you're struggling with the issue and marshalling such impressive resources with which to do your struggling. It is a tough one, and if I have been a little less than definitive about the precise issue of the relationship of the colleges to the church, please know that I love knowing you're in business. I love reading the list.

Agnes Scott,
Alma,
Arkansas,

all the way to

Whitworth,
Wilson, and
Wooster.

Regardless of how you resolve it, I'm proud of that list and of my church's involvement in it - and of you. God bless you.